

THE DRAMA.—MR. KEAN, &c.

From Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.

WITHIN our remembrance, the stage has not fallen off in any remarkable degree, either in the written or the acted performances. It has changed its style considerably in both these respects, but it does not follow that it has altogether deteriorated: it has shifted its ground, but has found its level. With respect to the pieces brought out, we have got striking melodramas for dull tragedies; and short farces are better than long ones of five acts. The *semper varium et mutabile* of the poet, may be transferred to the stage, "the inconstant stage," without losing the original felicity of the application:—it has its necessary ebbs and flows, from its subjection to the influence of popular feeling, and the frailty of the materials of which it is composed, its own fleeting and shadowy essence; and cannot be expected to remain for any great length of time stationary at the same point, either of perfection or debasement. Acting, in particular, which is the chief organ by which it addresses itself to the mind;—the eye, tongue, hand by which it dazzles, charms, and seizes on the public attention—is an art that seems to contain in itself the seeds of perpetual renovation and decay, following in this respect the order of nature rather than the analogy of the productions of human intellect;—for whereas in the other arts of painting and poetry, the standard works of genius being permanent and accumulating, for awhile provoke emulation, but, in the end, overlay future efforts, and transmit only their defects to those that come after; the exertions of the greatest actor die with him, leaving to his successors only the admiration of his name, and the aspiration after imaginary

excellence: so that in effect "no one generation of actors binds another;" the art is always setting out afresh on the stock of genius and nature, and the success depends (generally speaking) on accident, opportunity, and encouragement. The harvest of excellence (whatever it may be) is removed from the ground, every twenty or thirty years, by Death's sickle; and there is room left for another to sprout up and tower to an equal height, and spread into equal luxuriance—to "dally with the wind, and court the sun"—according to the health and vigour of the stem, and the favourableness of the season. But books, pictures, remain like fixtures in the public mind; beyond a certain point incumber the soil of living truth and nature; and distort or stunt the growth of original genius. Again, the literary amateur may find employment for his time in reading old authors only, and exhaust his entire spleen in scouting new ones: but the lover of the stage cannot amuse himself, in his solitary fastidiousness, by sitting to witness a play got up by the departed **ghosts** of first-rate actors; or be contented with the perusal of a collection of old play-bills:—he may extol Garrick, but he must go to see Kean; and, in his own defence, must admire or at least tolerate what he sees, or stay away against his will. The theatrical critic may grumble a little, at first at a new candidate for the favour of the town, and say how much better the part must have been done formerly by some actor whom he never saw; but by degrees he makes a virtue of necessity, and submits to be pleased "with coy, reluctant, amorous delay"—devoting his attentions to the actual stage as he would to a living mis-

tress, whom he selects as a matter of course from the beauties of the present and not from those of the last age! We think there is for this reason less pedantry and affectation (though not less party-feeling and personal prejudice) in judging of the stage than of most other subjects; and we feel a sort of theoretical, as well as instinctive predilection for the faces of *play-going* people, as among the most sociable, gossiping, good-natured, and humane members of society. In this point of view as well as in others, the stage is a test and school of humanity. We do not much like any person or persons who do not like plays; and for this reason, *viz.* that we imagine they cannot much like themselves or any one else. The really humane man (except in cases of unaccountable prejudices, which we do not think the most likely means to increase or preserve the natural amiableness of his disposition) is prone to the study of humanity. *Omnes boni et liberales HUMANITATIA semper favemus.* He likes to see it brought home from the universality of precepts and general terms, to the reality of persons, of tones, and actions; and to have it raised from the grossness and familiarity of sense, to the lofty but striking platform of the imagination. He likes to see the face of man with the veil of time torn from it, and to feel the pulse of nature beating in all times and places alike. The smile of good humoured surprise at folly, the tear of pity at misfortune, do not misbecome the face of man or woman. It is something delightful and instructive, to have seen Coriolanus or King John in the habiliments of Mr. Kemble, to have shaken hands almost with Othello in the person of Mr. Kean, to have cowered before the spirit of Lady Macbeth in the glance of Mrs. Siddons. The stage at once gives a body to our thoughts, and refinement and expansion to our sensible impressions. It has not the pride and remoteness of abstract science: it has not the petty egotism of vulgar life. It is particularly wanted in great cities (where it of course flourishes most) to take off from the dissatisfaction and

ennui, that creep over our own pursuits from the indifference or contempt thrown upon them by others; and at the same time to reconcile our numberless discordant incommensurable feelings and interests together, by giving us an immediate and common topic to engage our attention, and to rally us round the standard of our common humanity. We never hate a face that we have seen in the pit.

The only drawback on the felicity and triumphant self-complacency of a play-goer's life, arises from the shortness of life itself. We miss the favourites, not of another age, but of our own—the idols of our youthful enthusiasm; and we cannot replace them by others. It does not shew that *these* are worse, because they are different from *those*: though they had been better, they would not have been so good to us. It is the penalty of our nature, from Adam downwards: so Milton makes our first ancestor exclaim,—

“Should God create
Another Eve, and I another rib afford,
Yet loss of thee would never from my heart.”

We offer our best affections, our highest aspirations after the good and beautiful, on the altar of youth: it is well if, in our after-age, we can sometimes rekindle the almost extinguished flame, and inhale its dying fragrance like the breath of incense, of sweet-smelling flowers and gums, to detain the spirit of life, the ethereal guest, a little longer in its frail abode—to cheer and sooth it with the pleasures of memory, not with those of hope. While we can do this, life is worth living for: when we can do it no longer, its spring will soon go down, and we had better not be!—Who shall give us Mrs. Siddons again, but in a waking dream, a beatific vision of past years, crowned with other hopes and other feelings, whose pomp is also faded, and their glory and their power gone! Who shall in our time (or can ever to the eye of fancy) fill the stage, like her, with the dignity of their persons, and the emanations of their minds? Or who shall sit majestic in the throne of tragedy—a Goddess, a prophetess

and a Muse—from which the lightning of her eye flashed o'er the mind, starting its inmost thoughts—and the thunder of her voice circled through the labouring breast, rousing deep and scarce known feelings from their slumber? Who shall stalk over the stage of horrors, its presiding genius, or “play the hostess,” at the banqueting scene of murder? Who shall walk in sleepless ecstasy of soul, and haunt the mind’s eye ever after, with the dread pageantry of suffering and of guilt? Who shall make tragedy once more stand with its feet upon the earth, and with its head raised above the skies, weeping tears and blood? That loss is not to be repaired. While the stage lasts, there will never be another Mrs. Siddons! Tragedy seemed to set with her; and the rest are but blazing comets or fiery exhalations.—It is pride and happiness enough for us to have lived at the same time with her, and one person more! But enough on this subject. Those feelings that we are most anxious to do justice to, are those to which it is impossible we ever should! * * *

From the favourite actors of a few years back, we turn to those of the present day: and we shall speak of them, not with grudging or stinted praise.

The first of these in tragedy is Mr. Kean. To show that we do not conceive that tragedy regularly declines in every successive generation, we shall say, that we do not think there has been in our remembrance any tragic performer (with the exception of Mrs. Siddons) equal to Mr. Kean. Nor, except in voice and person, and the conscious ease and dignity naturally resulting from those advantages, do we know that even Mrs. Siddons was greater. In truth of nature and force of passion, in discrimination and originality, we see no inferiority to any one on the part of Mr. Kean: but there is an insignificance of figure, and a hoarseness of voice, that necessarily *vulgarise*, or diminish our idea of the characters he plays: and perhaps to this may be added, a want of a certain correspondent elevation and magnitude of thought, of which Mrs. Siddons’s noble form seem-

ed to be only the natural mould and receptacle. Her nature seemed always above the circumstances with which she had to struggle: her soul to be greater than the passion labouring in her breast. Grandeur was the cradle in which her genius was rockéd: for *her* to be, was to be sublime! she did the greatest things with child-like ease: her powers seemed never tasked to the utmost, and always as if she had inexhaustible resources still in reserve. The least word she uttered seemed to float to the end of the stage: the least motion of her hand seemed to command awe and obedience. Mr. Kean is all effort, all violence, all extreme passion: he is possessed with a fury, a demon that leaves him no repose, no time for thought, or room for imagination. He perhaps screws himself up to as intense a degree of feeling as Mrs. Siddons, strikes home with as sure and as hard a blow as she did, but he does this by straining every nerve, and winding up every faculty to this single point alone: and as he does it by an effort himself, the spectator follows him by an effort also. Our sympathy in a manner ceases with the actual impression, and does not leave the same grand and permanent image of itself behind. The Othello furnishes almost the only exception to these remarks. The solemn and beautiful manner in which he pronounces the farewell soliloquy, is worth all gladiatorship and pantomime in the world. His Sir Giles is his most equal and energetic character: but it is too equal, too energetic from the beginning to the end. There is no reason that he should have the same eagerness, the same *impetus* at the commencement as at the close of his career: he should not have the fierceness of the wild beast till he is goaded to madness by the hunters. Sir Giles Mompesson (supposed to be the original character) we dare say, took things more quietly, and only grew desperate with his fortunes. Cooke played the general casting of the character better in this respect: but without the same fine breaks and turns of passion. Cooke indeed, compared to Kean, had only the *slang* and *bravado* of tragedy. Neither can we think Mr. Kemble equal

to him, with all his study, his grace and classic dignity of form. He was the statue of perfect tragedy, not the living-soul. Mrs. Siddons combined the advantage of form and other organic requisites, with nature and passion : Mr. Kemble has the external requisites, (at least of face and figure) without the internal workings of the soul : Mr. Kean has the last without the first, and, if we

must make our election between the two, we think the *vis tragica* must take precedence of every thing else. Mr. Kean, in a word, appears to us a test, an *experimentum crucis*, to shew the triumph of genius over physical defects, of nature over art, of passion over affectation, and of originality over commonplace monotony.

respectable one previously in existence. As it is a rare thing to find theatres without actors, we have abundance of the latter among us, all 'eager for the fight' that is to ensure to them the victory of popular applause. The two first tragedians of the age now sojourn in the western world, delighting and astonishing us with their rare merits, and inscribing on the historic column of the new hemisphere names that posterity will doubtless know how to honor and appreciate.

The arrival of Mr. Macready is a proud era in the history of his dramatic career, as it opens to him a new field where laurels may be plucked green from the living stem of popular favor, and added to the wreath he already so justly wears. We have given in another place a short memoir of this amiable man; it is at best, we own, a scanty outline, but we are willing to take the incidents as there set down, since they wear this evidence of truth—that they record acts most honorable to the author of them.

As we have an opportunity of speaking only once a week, we must beg leave to enumerate, with our usual brevity, all the characters that Mr. Macready has appeared in, rather than enter into an elaborate disquisition of any one of them.—On Monday Mr. M., for the first time, trod the boards of an American stage, in the character of *Virginius*, in the presence of an audience of the most respectable description, and comprising all the talent and critical acumen of this great city. His reception was every thing that he himself could wish—being compounded of a just and discriminating taste, and a generous welcome. We were not so fortunate, from the crowded state of the house, as to see the whole of the performance, but that little which we did see, only tended to make us sensible of what we had lost. There appeared from the outset to be the best possible conception of the part, and keeping in the acting; and the deportment and carriage of the actor was full of grandeur and true Roman dignity, which however was beautifully subdued when the parental feelings overcame the sternness of the patriot in betrothing his beloved daughter to *Ichius*. The passage was sketched with a master's hand, and remains imprinted on the mind a living picture for all who saw it to remember and admire. There was, in delivering the words 'I do betrothe her to thee,' a softness and sweetness of manner altogether peculiar to Mr. Macready, and to which we would fain call the attention (as the piece is announced for repetition) of those who have not seen and felt it. We then experienced a hiatus in our view of the stage, until nearly the close of the piece, when we again saw *Virginius* frantically struggling with the *decmvir*. He was then wound up to a pitch of madness and despair which baffles description; grief had fled but phrenzy had taken possession of the soul and laid prostrate all the milder passions with the fury of a hurricane. At length the urn was brought to him containing the ashes of the dear departed, which broke the spell that bound down all his fatherly affections. In a moment he was calm, rational and subdued: and embraced the precious relic with such fondness—wept over it so tenderly and pressed it to his bosom, in a manner so touchingly beautiful, that nature seemed proud of her victory when he yielded up his life before that shrine which he had consecrated to honor and virtue. So the benumbed warrior whose wound has been stanch'd by the frost, pours out his life's blood, in the luxury of the warmth that is applied to resuscitate him.*

We have left ourselves but little room to speak of *Macbeth* and *Damon*, which Mr. M. performed on Wednesday and Friday. We consider *Macbeth* to be the most successful effort he has yet made; we believe it also to be his best piece of acting; and we believe it further more, as many do beside us, to be the best representation of *Macbeth* ever seen in America. Its novelties and peculiarities are ample, had we time to enumerate them; one of the most striking, is the scene with *Banquo's* ghost. Shakspeare brought forward the ghost to frighten *Macbeth*, as shown by Mr. Macready, whereas we have *Macbeths* who have made it their business to frighten the ghost.

In the general summary of Mr. M.'s acting we confess that we have seen many passages performed more to our liking by others. The flashes of *Kean's* genius make us dizzy with the intensity of their blaze—the fine and commanding figure of *Cooper* may charm us, and the graceful movements of *Conway* please us; but we have never sat out a whole play with more real gratification than we have done with Mr. Macready.

There are two distinguishing characteristics in Mr. Macready's acting—one, a full and complete conception of the part he is representing, and the other a uniformity of good acting throughout the whole piece. These distinguishing traits are quite obvious to the commonest observer, and prove in the one case his industry, talent, and good understanding; while the other ensures him success (even if he should not come up to some others in particular passages) when his character is taken in the whole and his performance viewed in the aggregate.

Virginius will be repeated on Monday.

Mr. Keau continues in *Quebec*, having re-engaged himself for six nights.

Mr. Maywood has returned from a very pleasant and successful campaign in the interior of the state. He will doubtless make a good arrangement with some one of the many theatres now open in this city. There is too much rivalry for so great a favourite to remain long unengaged.

Mr. and Mrs. Hilson, Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, and most of the old favourites remain at the Park; but we regret on many accounts the absence of an old standard like Mr. Kent.

* It is well known that one strong passion can be frequently removed by creating another. When Mr. Percival was assassinated in the lobby of the House of Commons, the horrible fact was too rashly communicated to Mrs. P. The instantaneous effect was a strong hysterical affection, which seemed to rivet every faculty with the spell of a magic power—tears she had none—she was conscious, but not sensible—all appeared to be one unutterable agony, threatening the total overthrow of mental and bodily organization. In this extremity the medical attendants suggested the idea of bringing her into the presence of her husband's bleeding corpse, then just borne to his home. The experiment succeeded—a shriek and a flood of tears announced the return of reason, and that she was at length enabled to mourn for her loss.

The Drama.

Theatrical business seems to be at its zenith in New York; indeed its increase of late has been almost without parallel. Within two years three theatres have been erected in addition to the large and

THE DRAMA.

From the European Magazine.

DRURY-LANE, MAY, 1817.

MAY 14th' 1817, Mr. Kean made his first appearance in the character of Eustache de St. Pierre, in Colman's historical play of *The Surrender of Calais*. We shall not stop to examine whether the author has raised in this drama a superstructure worthy of the noble foundation furnished by history : our business here is with those by whom the characters of the piece, such as it is, were personated. The excellence of Kean as its hero adds if possible, to his former reputation. The cynic, the warm patriot, and the father were alternately portrayed by him with a force and fidelity which irresistibly claimed the heartfelt applause of the audience. His rebuke of the mutinous citizens ; his commiseration of the distress of his old townsman to whom he gives his last morsel ; his reproaches of his son who proposes to secret provisions for themselves ; his offer of himself as the first victim to save his fellow-citizens ; and his ironical address to the King at the place of execution, were passages that demanded particular approbation.

The *Macbeth* of Mr. Kean has afforded an excellent opportunity for the display of his peculiar abilities—or at least in the way in which he performs this character. In the dignity and majesty of the character, he is evidently not equal to Kemble. In the passion, and ardour, and inspiration, he greatly excels him. We think, however, that in one instance he was deficient of a proper understanding of his author, or rather of a peculiar feeling of the mind, and of the expression of that feeling in a particular scene. In the banquet scene *Macbeth* is struck with horror, not indignation, at the appearance of the ghost of the murdered *Banquo*. He forgets the prejudice of every one and every thing but the object of his terror, and disturbs the feast “with most admired disorder.” *Lady Macbeth* hastily dismisses her guests and then seizing the arm of her husband, reproves

him, at least by a look and attitude, for his imprudent self discovery. *Macbeth* answers her, “As I stand here, I saw him.” This is spoken under the continuance of the same impression of horror, but upon the point of recovery. Kean did not give this part in its proper spirit, and we think he was decidedly wrong. There are two things which are required to constitute an excellent actor—judgment and natural powers ; the knowledge of what he has to do, and the physical faculties of doing it.

COVENT GARDEN.

On the 3d of May, *The Apostate*, a tragedy from the pen of Mr. Sheil, was performed for the first time. The scene is laid at Grenada, in Spain, during the reign of Philip II. The piece opens with the entrance of Hemeya, (C. Kemble) the heir of the Moorish Kings, with two of his friends, who endeavour to rouse him to a sense of the wrongs of his oppressed nation. He deplors their hopeless condition and his own ; avows his love for Florinda, (Miss O'Neill) the daughter of Count Alvarez, (Murray) and his despair at the encouragement given by her father to the suit of Pescara, (Macready) governor of Grenada. The mansion of Alvarez suddenly takes fire ; he vows to give his daughter and fortune to the man who shall save her. Hemeya ignorant of his promise, rushes through the flames and bears the swooning Florinda in safety to the gardens of the castle, where love and gratitude break the bonds of maiden reserve, and she acknowledges the passion which she had long secretly cherished for her deliverer. Scarcely has Alvarez, in fulfilment of his own oath joined the hands of the lovers, when Count Pescara enters and produces a royal edict forbidding upon pain of death any Moor to marry a christian woman without previously renouncing the Mahometan faith. Alvarez demands an immediate abjuration of Hemeya, who finding that he must relinquish either his mistress or his religion consents after a violent inward struggle

to become an apostate. At this critical moment, Malec, (Young) his old preceptor, who has been endeavouring to rouse the remains of his nation to reassert their independence, in the hope of placing the crown of his fathers on the head of Hemeya, arrives at Grenada. He employs the strong arguments of patriotism and honour to dissuade Hemeya from his purpose, and has nearly prevailed, when Florinda appears and fixes her hesitating lover. Malec, enraged by the effect of her charms on the mind of the pupil, advances to stab her, but her beauty unnerves his arm, and he drops the dagger at her feet. Hemeya retires with Alvarez to prepare for his abjuration; while Malec repairs to his friends, to acquaint them with the intended insurrection. They are interrupted by the sudden entrance of Hemeya, who advises Malec to fly, as the officers of the Inquisition are coming to seize him. The undaunted Moor commands his friends to withdraw from the danger, but though he has the same opportunity of escape, he, with more resolution than prudence remains to be taken himself. The servants of the inquisition headed by Pescara, force the gates; Malec is accused of having endeavoured to seduce a convert, meaning Hemeya, back to the Mahometan faith, but is informed that he may save his life by becoming a Christian. The unhappy prince now perceives the artifice of his rival, who under the mask of friendship, had sent him with the warning to his preceptor. Malec is led off: Hemeya draws upon Pescara; they fight, but are separated by Florinda, who rushes between them, and the governor retires. Hemeya vows to save Malec or perish; and before he goes, he makes Florinda swear, that she will die rather than become the wife of Pescara. A train of inquisitors lead Malec in chains to execution: Hemeya follows in disguise, and with the assistance of the Moors rescues his preceptor from the stake. Malec and his friends fly from Grenada, with Florinda, while Hemeya, left alone to defend the pass and afford time for their escape, is overpowered. Florinda is retaken, and as the only means of saving the life of her

2Z ATHENEUM VOL. 1.

lover, she consents, notwithstanding her solemn vow, to become the wife of Pescara. The fifth act opens with an exquisitely beautiful moonlight view of Grenada, and the Moors, from the Alpuxerra mountains, hastening to rescue Hemeya. The scene changes to the prison; Florinda enters in bridal garments to free her lover, who spurns her when he learns that she has married his mortal enemy. Pescara follows his bride to the prison, and enraged at the affection which she breathes for Hemeya, orders him, in breach of his promise, to instant death. The executioners seize him: at this moment an alarm proclaims the success of the Moors. Pescara attempts to stab Florinda; Hemeya breaks loose, wrests the dagger from his grasp and plunges it into his heart. The Moors rush in: Hemeya's exultation is complete, till Florinda, pale and faint, declares that she had swallowed a deadly poison before she approached the altar. Hemeya in despair stabs himself, and Florinda sinks lifeless on the body of her lover.

That meritorious favourite of the public, Mr. John Kemble, is going through his principal characters, preparatory to his final farewell to the stage. On the 25th of April, he appeared for the last time in the part of the Stranger, and on the 8th of May in that of Penrddock. The 13th was fixed for his last representation of Hotspur in the play of Henry IV. but at the conclusion, the fire and energy of his performance produced an unanimous cry for his repetition of the character, and the promise of his reappearance in it was hailed with a long-continued burst of acclamation. On the 15th he personated Cato, and on the 17th Brutus, for the last time.—*New Mon. Mag.* May 1817.

THE LADY MACLEAN, OF DUART.

SOME time since, a very interesting and popular little piece was brought out at our theatres, entitled *The Lady of the Rock*, and which, no doubt, many of our fair readers have witnessed with much feeling for the fate of the unhappy lady. The origin of this tale is literally taken from the history of the Highlands of Scotland; and the facts from which

the dramatist borrowed his story are as follow :—

In former times one of the Macleans, of Duart, married a sister of Argyle. This lady was amiable and beautiful, but unfortunately she had been married some years without producing an heir to the house of Duart, with whom her sterility was her crime ; her husband hated her on this account, and resolved on her destruction. In order to screen himself from detection, he hired ruffians to convey her secretly to a bare rock near Lismore ; and there she was left to perish at the coming up of the tide. Here the hapless lady sat watching the rolling tide which she expected every moment to overwhelm her ; when fortunately she perceived a vessel sailing down the Sound of Mull, in the very direction of the rock on which she was sitting. She displayed every signal she could think of to attract the notice of the crew ; and, at length, they perceived her, and drew near the rock. She soon made herself known, and informed them that it was by order of a barbarous husband she was left on the rock. The sailors, with that usual generosity belonging to mariners, took pity on her, received her on board, and conveyed her safely to her brother at Inverary.

Macleane of Duart made a grand mock funeral, and pretended deeply to lament his departed lady, whom he announced to have died suddenly. He wrote some very disconsolate letters to his relations, and particularly to Argyle, on whom he waited, after a decent time given to seclusion, clad in deep mourning ; where, with the greatest shew of grief, he lamented to his brother-in-law the irreparable loss he had sustained. Argyle said nothing, but sent for his sister ; whose appearance, blooming with health, acted as an electrical shock on the perfidious husband. Argyle was of a mild and peaceable disposition, and took no other revenge on Maclean than by commanding him instantly to quit his presence ; at the same time advising him to keep out of the way of his brother Donald, who would, if he met him, certainly take his life for having attempted to destroy that of his sister. Sir Donald Campbell did meet him afterwards in the streets of Edinburgh, and stabbed him for the intended murder of his sister, when Maclean was eighty years of age.

The Castle of Duart is now a heap of ruins on a promontory in Mull, and stands nearly opposite to the Lady's Rock in the Island of Lismore.—*La Belle As. May 1817.*

" WAS SHAKSPEARE MAD ?"

From the New Monthly Magazine, May, 1818.

ALTHOUGH Shakspeare set an early and a noble example of attention to character, yet it is surprising that he has had few or no imitators. His successors have found it easier to make the various personages of their drama utter the common places of poetry than express the language of nature. In this respect, indeed, Shakspeare stands quite alone; none, either in ancient or modern times, can so much as bear a comparison with him. He has entered into all the diversity of character, both gay and grave, with such equal facility as to render it difficult to determine whether his strength lay chiefly in tragedy or comedy. He has also soared above "existence's bounded reign," and introduced us to all the different orders of preternatural beings—**ghosts**, fairies, witches, goblins, &c.; among whom also may be included dreamers and madmen. Into the whole of this sphere, as Dryden observes, none but he could enter.

The proper method of exhibiting with truth the actions or discourse of our fellow-creatures, either in a dramatic or historical form, is sufficiently obvious. The writer must suppose that he is the very person whom he wishes to represent; and ask himself how he would act or speak if similarly circumstanced. It does not appear, one would think, very impracticable, even in imagination,

2S **ATHENEUM**. Vol. 3.

to kindle in our minds sentiments of love, of indignation, or contempt, all of which we have experienced, or are capable of experiencing. Yet, to paint human passions in their true colours has been found a very rare accomplishment, and one of the highest efforts of genius. What astonishing force and sublimity of mind, then, must that writer possess, who can, in some shape, transport himself out of his own nature, and enter into the notions of a merely imaginary race, who are supposed to be actuated by a distinct set of principles; and, what appears still more difficult, can give form and consistency to the conduct of madmen, whose minds are subject to no fixed principles! Of all the varieties of madness which Shakspeare has exhibited, that of King Lear is in all respects the most conspicuous. It is so lively and affecting that it may be said to be almost nature itself. I recollect once, that when a gentleman was reading this play, a lady present was so much impressed with a sense of reality, in the actions and language of the distracted king, that she could not help calling out—"Was Shakspeare mad?"

Another very curious and striking illustration of the truth of Shakspeare's delineation of madness in the character of Lear lately occurred to me:—I happened to be in conversation with an old

gentleman, now deceased, whom I had known for some years, but never before suspected that he was "at times not in his perfect mind." He was recounting to me the transactions of his past life, on which he dwelt with the utmost composure for a considerable time ; but when he entered on a particular topic, the purchase of some valuable leasehold property, of which, as I afterwards understood, he had been swindled by the artifices of a brother, I soon perceived that he was approaching the subject which had been the cause of his derangement. He appeared suddenly wrapt in thought, his countenance darkened, and he looked around him with the wildest stare imaginable. It was evident that he was impressed with the same horrible sensations as Lear before he was wholly bereft of his reason ; and, like him, was sensible of venturing on dangerous ground—

Oh that way madness lies ; let me shun that,
No more of that—

In like manner did this poor gentleman start back from the dreadful idea. Hideous forms, such as he only could conceive, rushed on his imagination. Instead of proceeding in the narrative he had begun, in an elevated tone he thus questioned me :—"Have you any brothers ?—Beware of brothers !—Have nothing to do with brothers !" and abruptly departed. The whole of this behaviour is an exact counterpart of King Lear's. The deceitful machinations of his brother, having been the cause of his own undoing, had so completely engrossed his mind, that he imagined such must be the general origin of all evil. The distracted king's philosophy of daughters was precisely the same as this man's with regard to brothers. Your readers will recollect, that when he beheld Edgar lying half-naked among the straw, in a cold tempestuous night, he was convinced that nothing but the unkindness of his daughters could have reduced him to such a pitch of misery.

Lear.—What have his daughters brought him to this pass ?

Couldst thou save nothing ? didst thou give them all ?

Fool.—Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed.

Lear.—Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air

Hang o'er men's faults, light on thy daughters !

Kent.—He hath no daughters, sir.

Lear.—Death, traitor ! nothing could have subduced nature

To such a lowness, but his unkind daughters.

We are continually hearing many cant praises of the inimitable genius of Shakespeare, of his bold untutored imagination, and his intuitive knowledge of human nature ; but his judgment is never particularly pointed out. It appears to me, however, that in this faculty he eminently excelled ; and, indeed, yields to no other poet, ancient or modern. On account of some glaring, but trivial blunders, which the meanest capacity could have avoided or corrected ; and certain chronological and geographical errors, some of which it is evident he was sensible of but disregarded, it is the custom to represent him as the wildest and most injudicious of all writers. A few of his plays are indeed of little value in any point of view ; but in those where he has exerted the whole force of his genius, they will be found, in the material parts, equally conspicuous for judgment and imagination. I know no narrative, either historical or dramatic, conducted with more good sense and deep reflection than the account of Lear's madness from its commencement to its consummation. Not only will the man of taste experience the highest delight from its perusal, but the most profound philosopher may be instructed by it. With what infinite art and sagacity does the poet prepare us for the catastrophe ! He leaves no circumstance untouched that might tend to aggravate the distress of the unhappy king. His extreme old age ; his royal character ; the irritability consequent on the long use of absolute power : the distracting discovery, when too late, of his injustice to Cordelia ; the harshness and ingratitude of his eldest daughters contrasted with the simplicity and overflowing kindness of his own nature ; the midnight tempest to which he is exposed ; are facts selected and expanded with the most perfect judgment, and adorned with the most pathetic touches, as well as the highest beauties of eloquence.

Madness is commonly occasioned, as in the case of Lear, by the perpetual pressure of some overwhelming idea

Addison, in his account of Sir Roger de Coverley, describes him as having his mind, in some degree, thus disturbed ; and wished to impart to his character a tincture of madness ; but the task proved too arduous : he afterwards found himself (as Dr. Johnson thinks) incapable of filling up his original delineation. "He describes the Knight (says this writer) as having his imagination somewhat warped, but of this perversion he has made very little use. The variable weather of the mind, (he continues), the flying vapours of incessant madness, which from time to time cloud reason without eclipsing it, it required so much nicety to exhibit, that Addison seems to have been deterred from prosecuting his own design." But what this ingenious writer, with all his various knowledge of human nature, could not so much as attempt, has been performed by our poet in the highest perfection. He has not merely drawn a picture of madness in its state of maturity, but has also presented the world with a complete historical representation of this mental disease, with philosophical acuteness, tracing it from its remote causes, and marking its progress in all its various stages.

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soared so high upon the wings of hope that the fall almost broke my heart; but soon the disappointment began to lose its bitterness, and I received a consolation (which, wicked as it was, I could not repress) in discovering that hundreds of unsuccessful authors were exactly in my condition: then I remembered that as great fame, once acquired, would be everlasting, I could not expect to acquire it without immense trouble, and assiduous application. Gradually I shook off the hateful fetters of gloomy despair, and, like some deluded slave to a false woman's charms, I allowed cheating hope to load me captive again. My brain began to effervesce with exuberance of imagination, and gave promise of something more exquisite still. Novel-writing was out of the question: I had manufactured one, and if the public did not like it, they might let it alone; and so they did—the more shame for them.

"I felt proud as Lucifer in my defeat, and was resolved never to compliment with another the world who had used my last so villainously. No, thought I, I'll write a play, and give Shakspeare and Otway a little rest. If I cannot get in the great temple one way, I'll try another; and, with increasing avidity, I went at it again. It was not long before I began to entertain the idea that my mind was peculiarly adapted for dramatic writing. I was not formed to wade through the dull drudgery of novel descriptions—to expatiate upon little rivulets, tinkling among big rocks—and amorous breezes making love to sentimental green trees. In my present avocation, the azure heavens, the frowning mountain, the broad ocean, the shadowy forest, and "all that sort of thing," would fall beneath the painter's care: skies would be manufactured to give light to my heroes, and cities would sprout up, in which they could act their adventures. My play would present a great field for triumph, and 'young, blushing Merit, and neglected Worth,' must be seen, and consequently admired. Now would the embodied visions of my fancy go to the hearts of the public through their ears, as well as their eyes, and genius would wing its sparkling way amid the thundering acclamations of thousands of admiring spectators. 'Now,' said I to myself, 'I have the eel of glory by the tail, and it shall not escape me, slippery as it is.'

"With a perseverance which elicited praise from myself, if from nobody else, I mounted my Pegasus, and jogged along this newly-discovered road to immortality. The external and common world melted from my mind when I sat down to my task, and, although it was evanescent as poets' pleasures generally are, few men enjoyed more happiness than I—as the tattered trappings of my poor garret seemed dipped in the enchanting magnificence of my dreams, and I rioted in visions of white paper snow-storms, and dramatic thunder and lightning. I sought every opportunity for stage-effect—to have trap-doors, and dungeons, unexpected assassinations, and resurrections, more unexpected still.

"My undertaking seemed very easy at first, but I soon found myself bewildered amid difficulties seriously alarming. At one time I brought a whole army of soldiers on the stage, and made them fight a prodigious battle, without discovering, till half the poor fellows were slain, that the whole affair had taken place in a lady's chamber! This was easily remedied, but I experienced infinitely more trouble with the next. I had formed a hero, in whom were concentrated all the virtues, beauties, and accomplishments of the human kind: a real Sir William Wallace—gigantic in person and mind—who never opened his lips but to speak blank verse—who did not know that there was

such a person as Fear on the face of the globe, and could put a whole army to flight by just offering to draw his sword. It was my design artfully to lead him into the greatest extremes of danger, and then artfully to lead him out again; but, in the paroxysm of my enthusiasm, I at length got him into a scrape, from which no human power could possibly extricate him.

"His enemies, determined not to give so terrible a fellow the slightest chance of escape, had confined him in a tremendous dungeon, deep, and walled around, on all sides, by lofty rocks and mountains, totally impenetrable. To this dreadful abode there was only one little entrance, which was strictly guarded by a whole band of soldiers, who were ordered never to take their eyes off the door, and always to keep their guns cocked. Now here was a predicament, and I knew not what to do. The whole of the preceding was so beautifully managed, that to cut it out would be impossible. Yet there he was, poor youth, without the slenderest hope of freedom, cooped up among everlasting mountains, beneath which Atlas himself might have groaned in vain. What was I to do? He must be released. The audience would expect it, as a common civility, that I would not murder him before their eyes. It would have been ungentle, to a degree. At length I hit it, after having conceived almost inconceivable plans, and vainly attempted to manage ponderous ideas, which were too heavy for my use. I proposed to introduce a ghost—a spirit which would at once please the pit, and be a powerful friend to the imprisoned soldier.

"At the dead of the night, when he sat ruminating on the vicissitudes of life, and spouting extemporaneous blank-verse soliloquies, (at which I had spent many midnight hours,) the genius of the mountain comes down in a thunder-cloud, and thus addresses the pensive hero. You will be pleased to observe the rude and natural dignity of language, which it was a great point with me to preserve.

Genius. Hero of earth, thine eyes look red with weeping.

Hero. (laying his hand upon his sword.) Who says he e'er saw Bamaloosa weep?

Gen. Nay, hold thy tongue, and shut thy wide-oped jaw: I come to save thee, if thou wilt be saved.

Hero. I will not perish, if I help it can;
But who will cleave these cursed rocks apart,
And give me leave to leave this cursed place,
Where lizards crawl athwart my shrinking flesh,
And bull-frogs jump, and toads do leap about.

Gen. I—I can do whate'er I have a mind:
I am the genius of this lonesome place,
And I do think you might more manners have,
Than thus to speak to him that is your host.

Hero. If thou art really what thou seemest to be,
Just let me out of this infernal hole.

Oh! my dear fellow, take me hence away—
'My soul's in arms, impatient for the fray!'
Take me from deeds I've often thought upon,
Down deep in dreadful dungeons darkly done!

"The alliteration in the last line melts the tender heart of the genius: he waves his hand in the air; his cloudy throne streams thunder and lightning from every side; instantaneously a convulsion ensues; the stage becomes a scene of general conflagration; a number of small imps, and little devils, fiery-breathed dragons, and red-nosed salamanders, are seen sporting about in the confusion, till the whole explodes, and out walks my man through a prodigious crack in the mountain, which heals up after him, as he goes along. The consternation of the guards may be imagined, but unless I had the MS. here, I could not attempt to describe it.

"At length it was written, rehearsed, and advertised, and its name, in great capitals, stared from every brick wall and wooden fence in the city.

"Delightful anticipations of immortality began

THE PLAY.

"Fierce champion, Fortitude, that knows no fears
"Of hisses, blows, or want, or loss of ears;
"Calm Temperance, whose blessings those partake
"Who hunger and who thirst for scribbling's sake."

My eccentric companion proceeded in his story, gathering new animation as he recapitulated the battles which he had fought, and the victories which he might have won.

"For a long time, sir, after the melancholy catastrophe of my novel, I was completely discouraged. I felt an indifference towards the world. I had

to throng upon my mind, and I could almost hear the various theatre cries of 'bravo,' 'encore,' and 'author.' With some trouble I had prepared a very handsome speech, to be spoken when I should be called out, and practised bowing before a looking-glass, with great success. Indeed, by the time the evening of representation arrived, I was prepared for every triumph which fate could have in store for me; and I had vowed an unalterable determination not to lose my firmness of mind in the heaviest flood of prosperity that could possibly pour in upon me.

"The evening arrived—a fine, cool, moon-light night. The stars twinkled upon me as I hastened to the theatre, as if congratulating me from their lofty stations in the sky, and the most refreshing breezes played around my head, methought whispering soft nonsense in my ear. I walked with a proud step to the door, entered majestically, and took my seat modestly.

"The house was already thronged with ladies and gentlemen, with their various appendages of quizzing-glasses and bamboo canes; and frequent murmurs of impatience buzzed around, by which I felt extremely flattered. The end of my troubles seemed already at hand, and I thought Fame, on her adamantine tablet, had already written 'William Lackwit, Esquire, author in general,' in letters too indelible for time itself to erase. Fear faded away in the dazzling brilliancy of that smiling multitude, and my soul floated about in its delicious element of triumphant hope, with a sensation such as arises after a good dose of exhilarating gas.

"Alas! 'twas but a dream! I soon perceived that fortune frowned on my efforts, and had taken the most undisguised method of blasting my hopes. A most diabolical influenza had for some time raged in the city, which on this very evening seemed at its height. A convulsion of coughing kept the whole audience in incessant confusion; and, with the most harrowing apprehensions, I listened to noises of every description, from the faint, sneeze-like effusion of some little girl's throat, to the deep-toned and far-sounding bellow of the portly alderman. Besides this, I had the pleasure to observe some of my most devoted enemies scattered, as if intentionally, through the critical pit, scowling in tenfold blackness upon the scene, and apparently waiting, in composed hatred, an opportunity to give me 'the goose.' Meditation raged high, as I observed these significant and threatening appearances, and I could scarcely have been in greater trepidation if I had been attacked with the hydrophobia itself.

"The curtain rose soon, and my first characters appeared; but, fire and fury! I did not recognise them myself!

"The play proceeded, and a scene ensued which gentlest moderation might denominate 'murder, most foul.' My dear sir, you can have no idea of it. They had cut out my most beautiful sentiments. The very identical remarks which I had intended should bring the house down, were gone, and 'left not a trace behind.' One recited a speech which was intended to have been spoken by another, and he spouted one that should not have been spoken at all. My finest specimens of rhetoric failed from their clumsy manner of delivery, and all my wit missed fire. Oh! if you could have seen them, like a pack of wild bulls in a garden of flowers, breaking rudely over all those delicate bushes of poetry, and trampling down the sweetest roses in the field of literature. The prettily-turned expressions, which should have been carefully breathed upon the audience, with a softened voice and pensive eye, were bawled out in an un-

varied, monotonous tone of voice, and a face as passionless as a barber's block. The whole play was destroyed!

"There was nip, and snip, and cut, and slish, and slash, till the first act ended, and then was a slight hiss. 'Cold drops of sweat stood on my trembling flesh;' but I pulled my hat fiercely over my beating brow, and, angry and desperate, prepared for the brooding storm. On my mountain scene I laid my principal dependence; and if that failed me, 'then welcome despair.' At last it came: there was the dungeon, and a man in it, with a wig, which covered the greatest part of his real hair, and a face sublimely cut and slashed over with a piece of coal. Instead of the beautiful countenance which had gleamed upon me in my poetic vision, there was a thin, hump-backed little fellow, with a tremendous pair of red whiskers, and a pug nose!—my fac-simile of Sir William Wallace with red whiskers and a pug nose!! Sir, it threw me into one of the most violent fevers I ever had.—Besides all these, 'his face was dirty, and his hands unwashed;' and he proceeded to give such a bombastic flourish of his arm, and his voice rose to such a high pitch, that he was hailed with loud laughter, and shouts of 'make a bow, Johnny—make a bow,' till my head reeled in delirious despair.

"But the language and stage-effect might redeem the errors of the actor, and I remained in a delightful agony for the result. Lazy time at length brought it upon the stage; but oh, ye gods! what a fall was there! As the thunder-cloud and genius were floating gracefully down, one of the ropes cracked, and the enchanter of the cavern hurt his nose against the floor, notwithstanding a huge pair of gilt paste-board wings, which spread themselves at his shoulders. He got up, however, and went on till the explosion was to have taken place: then he waved his wand, with an air which was not intended to have been resisted; but, *miserabile dictu!* the crack would not open, and Balamoosa trotted off by one of the side-scenes, amidst hoots of derision from every part of the house.

"The green curtain fell. A universal hiss, from 'the many-headed monster of the pit,' rung heavily in my ears. I had seen my poor play murdered and damned in one night, and it was enough to quench all future hopes of literary eminence. I rushed, desperate, from the spot, not choosing to stay for the farce; and, in the confusion of unsuccessful genius, I kicked two little red-headed fellows into the gutter for asking of me a check.

"In the anguish of my disappointment, I dreamed a combination of every thing horrible, to tantalize and terrify my poor, tired brain; and I arose with a head-ach and a heart-ach, and no very great opinion of any one in the world, but myself.

"You have convinced me that generosity has not taken French leave of every bosom, and I shall always look back upon the moments I have spent with you as bright exceptions to those of my past life. And now," continued he, pocketing the remaining bone, putting a couple of potatoes in his bosom, and taking a long draught of wine—"and now, I trust, we are square: you have provided me a dinner, and I have treated you to 'a feast of reason and a flow of soul.' If I see you again, 'I shall remember you were bountiful;' if not, God bless you and yours." He gave me a hearty shake by the hand, and dashed from the room. I caught a glimpse of his figure as he passed the window—and saw the poor author no more. F.